

Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies
Chicana/o Studies 175
Comparative Social Movements
Fall Quarter 2009

Class Meetings: Mondays, 9:30-12:20 PM (South Hall 1623)
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COURSE OBJECTIVES

This class will focus on the relationship between religion and social movements. More specifically, we will explore various individuals that have relied on fasting, hunger strikes, and other forms of non-violent “high-risk” activism (e.g. living in small, egalitarian, intentional communities or living among displaced and marginalized peoples) to create social change. Let me explain with slightly greater depth here. With the rise of various forms of Islamic and Christian-based fundamentalism and religious-oriented terrorism or violence, many people quite rightfully have serious reservations and doubts about religion in general and faith-based forms of activism today. In addition, given the nature of the world’s numerous ills (with global warming, the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the global economic melt-down, hunger, homelessness, and the list could go on and on), many people feel rather powerless and helpless today. The situation that we’re facing today, as human being on this planet, seems so vast, leading one to perhaps ask, “What can one person really do to change the world?” This seems to be the prevailing viewpoint today. Many seem to not only doubt religion, but themselves as well.

I too have doubts about both. I come into this class calling myself a Chicano, Catholic/Christian, Marxist who is currently going through another transformation of sorts (we’ll talk about the nature of this as the class progresses). I understand why some people doubt or reject religion given all that has taken place in the name of “religion,” but I think that it is important to know that people from many different religious and faith-based traditions (Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and many others) have challenged war, racism, hunger, poverty, AIDS, sexism, domestic violence, capital punishment, and many other pressing concerns. Just as those “powers and principalities” from all over the world have relied on religion and various sacred texts (e.g. the Bible, Koran, etc.) to justify their often oppressive actions, people like M.K. Gandhi, Cesar Chavez, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Oscar, Romero, Jean Donovan, Dorothy Day, Bobby Sands, Daniel and Phillip Berrigan, and many, many more have relied on those same sources to bring about a world where the “lion and lamb lie down together”—in peace and harmony. What’s remarkable about these individuals (who, incidentally, are almost all “Christian”—please forgive me for that—this is my bias—I will try to focus on non-Christians too and folks who might not be religious at all) and what this class will focus on is how they sacrificed virtually their entire lives to reduce suffering and misery all over the world.

That is to say, these people, at times, used their physical bodies as “weapons” to bring about a new world. I guess one could call these people “extremists” because some of them took Jesus’ words to heart when he said, “If you want to be perfect, go sell all you have and come follow me.” Those people (Romero, Gandhi, Donovan, etc.) gave up everything that they had, including at times, their very lives, to create a more just, dignified, and livable world. Most times, people assume that religious-based activists are conservative fanatics who hope to maintain a fairly oppressive status quo or create some mythical fantasy world (often through violence and injustice), when in fact, many have actually tried to turn the existing unequal order upside down through nonviolent direct action, that is to say, through “love.”

Seen from this perspective, “religion” need not be seen as a dirty or divisive word. There are many varieties of religious-based activists. Even though they may be the only one resisting and acting on their beliefs, their actions have often had powerful and far-reaching effects. Let’s not forget that Gandhi helped bring down the British Empire; Cesar Chavez helped farm workers obtain better wages and working conditions; Dorothy Day helped provide poor people with food and shelter; Jean Donovan helped Salvadorans who were being displaced and killed by a U.S.-supported military dictatorship in the 1980s. These people show us what faith in action looks like—they show what one faithful, loving, and compassionate person can do to change the world.

We certainly could explore how religion shaped many different social movements—like the African-American Civil Rights Movement, the Chicana/o Movement, or the labor movement, but in this class, I would like to focus on religious-based activists and the tactics that they have used (mainly, but not exclusively, hunger strikes and fasting) to create social change. Thus, a key issue in this class will be in exploring these individuals’ lives and the paths that led them to take such considerable risks. We will start out the class focusing on the history of fasting, hunger, and hunger strikes, paying specific attention to the relationship between famine, malnutrition, and the emergence of the hunger strike as a proverbial “weapon of the weak” in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. We will try to tease out the gendered dynamics behind hunger strikes as well, focusing on female saints and women suffragists in the United States and England in particular. Having done this, we will explore the lives of various individuals who have gone on fasts and hunger strikes—Gandhi, Cesar Chavez, and Irish Republican Army (IRA) soldiers in the early 1980s. We will then turn our attention to people, mostly women, in fact, like Jean Donovan, Chicana religious activists, and Dorothy Day who also made great sacrifices (“fasting” from their own wants and desires rather than from food) to create change. As we explore the lives of these individuals, we will want to explore the effectiveness, ethics, and morality of their various actions and we should also critique them too when need be. We should be careful in this class (and this sentence is directly mostly towards me and not you per se) to not lionize, idolize, or condemn these people—we want to understand their actions, what impact they might have had, and to honestly discuss their limitations and contradictions.

Books

1. Carole Garibaldi Rogers. 2004. **Fasting: Exploring a Great Spiritual Practice.** Norte Dame, IN: Sorin Books.
2. Sharman Apt Russell. 2006. **Hunger: An Unnatural History.** New York: Basic Books.
3. Eknath Easwaran. 1997. **Gandhi: The Man—The Story of His Transformation.** Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press.
4. Frederick John Dalton. 2004. **The Moral Vision of Cesar Chavez.** Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
5. Louise Dean. 2005. **This Human Season.** London: Harvest Books.
6. Ana Carrigan. 2005. **Salvador Witness: The Life and Calling of Jean Donovan.** Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
7. Lara Medina. 2005. **Las Hermanas: Chicana/Latina Religious Political Activism in the United States.** Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
8. Mike Yankoski. 2005. **Under the Overpass: Journey of Faith on the Streets of America.** Multnomah Books.
9. Course Reader—Grafikart

Assignments

1. Weekly writing assignments (2-3 pages, on assigned books, films, classroom exercises, etc.) due every Monday (please submit them in class, not over email). (Late papers will be deducted one letter grade for every day that they are not turned in. (25%)
2. Attendance and Participation—it should be noted here that this is an advanced undergraduate seminar. This means that should come to class every day having finished all the reading and film assignments. Class participation is essential for making this a worthwhile, engaging, and fun course. Missing class will definitely impact your grade since we will be meeting just once a week. More than one absence will cause you to lose two letter grades for this section of your grade. Please be in class, participate, and share with us what's on your heart and mind. If you have any health or personal reasons for missing more than one class, please contact me right away. For this class to really work, everyone needs to read, participate, be on time, and take risks—meaning, speak up, share with us your views, and really try to open up—show us what's inside your heart and soul. (25%)
3. Final Exam—December 10 (Thursday). The exam will be comprehensive and include several short-answer questions and two longer essay questions. (25%)

4. Research or Class Project—this will be determined as the class unfolds. Students may write a paper on a particular faith-based activist who participated in a specific social movement or our class may creatively decide to become involved in a social movement, either on campus or in the wider community (meaning in Santa Barbara, or perhaps linking up with a movement in Los Angeles or elsewhere). A decision regarding this matter will be made no later than the third week of the quarter. (25%)

Final Notes

I mentioned this point above with respect to class attendance and participation but I want to reiterate it here because it is quite important. I have rather high hopes for this class because it represents something new and unique for me—it is about a topic that I am currently doing research on and hope to write a book about. I think that the material is fascinating and inspiring. I hope that you will find it likewise, but of course, this may not be the case, which is fine too. To go well, this class will depend on many different factors, the main ones being preparation and risk-taking. Seminars seem to rise and fall on whether or not the folks taking them read the material and are willing to talk about it. We will have only 20-25 students in this class and so I am hoping for some good, meaningful, and rich discussions to emerge from our weekly class meetings. Please come to class prepared—be on time, don't text or rely on other electronic devices (please don't use computers during class either), read the material, ask questions, participate, and most importantly, share with us who you are and what you care about. The best way to do well in this class is to be engaged on all levels—read, write deep, substantive papers that explore the readings and films, maybe stop by office hours, and get involved. I really do hope that we have a powerful, inspiring, and uplifting class. **Please be aware that this is syllabus is a working document and is subject to change as the class unfolds.**

Class Topics and Readings

- Sept. 28 (#1) Class Introductions—Who Are You; Why Are You Here; What Moves You; What Do You Hunger For; What Would You Be Willing to Do to Create Social Change?
Video: **The Girl in the Café** (90 minutes)
- Oct. 5 (#2) Fasting, Religion, Spirituality, and Social Movements
Reading: Rogers, **Fasting** (entire book)
Fagen (article in reader)
- Oct. 12 (#3) Hunger, Hunger Strikes, and Social Movements
Reading: Russell, **Hunger** (entire book)
Vernon (article in reader)
Key Date: Indigenous People's Day ("Columbus Day")
- Oct. 14 Campus/UC System-Wide Teach-In (will be discussed in class)

- Oct. 18 Community-Building Exercise—Pot-luck and Film
Video: **Gandhi** (entire film, 3 hours) (7:00-10:00 PM, SH 1623)
(film will be at Kerr Learning Labs if you can't attend)
- Oct. 19 (#4) Gandhi, Fasting, Gender, and Non-Violence
Reading: Easwaran, **Gandhi** (entire book)
Cortright (article in reader)
- Oct. 26 (#5) Cesar Chavez, Fasting, and the United Farm Workers
Reading: Dalton, **The Moral Vision of Cesar Chavez** (entire book)
Shaw (article in reader)
Speaker: Andre Vasquez (UCSB Alumni, Hunger Striker)
- Nov. 2 (#6) Northern Ireland, Hunger Strikes, Gender, and Nationalism
Reading: Dean, **This Human Season** (entire book)
Video: **Some Mother's Son** (approx. 100 minutes)
- Nov. 9 (#7) Jean Donovan, the Solidarity Movement, and El Salvador
Reading: Carrigan, **Salvador Witness** (entire book)
Dear (article in reader)
Video: **Roses in December** (60 minutes)
- Nov. 16 (#8) Las Hermanas, Gender, and the Catholic Church
Reading: Medina, **Las Hermanas** (entire book)
Key Date: 20th Anniversary of Jesuits' Murder in El Salvador
- Nov. 23 (#9) Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker
Video: **Don't Call me a Saint** (60 minutes)
Speaker: Dennis Apel, Catholic Worker
- Nov. 30 (#10) Youth, Activism, and Spirituality
Reading: Yankoski, **Under the Overpass**
Speaker: Nicole Janelle (possible)
Key Date: 10th Anniversary of Battle in Seattle
- Dec. 10 Final Exam (SH 1623, 8:00-11:00 AM)